

Forteviot cist: strike-a-light

Raw material

The artefact is of light brownish grey flint (after Munsell 2.5Y 6/2) measuring 77mm in length, with a width of 34mm, and thickness 15mm. There is a lightly pitted, hardened smooth/chalky cortex on the right lateral side from the medial to the distal end, and traces at the distal end.

There are no known sources of flint in Perth and Kinross (Wickham-Jones and Collins 1977). The cortex suggests that the raw material derives from fluvio-glacial riverine deposits.

Blank: prior to modification

A secondary, regular blade-like flake struck from a simple platform core using a platform reduction strategy. There is a pronounced bulb of percussion, and ripples to the ventral surface indicating the use of a hard hammer. This removed part of the bulb of percussion during the detachment process. A colour change indicates a later small removal from the ventral surface (10mm by 6mm), contrasting to the marginal patination to the rest of the blank.

The dorsal surface has multiple step terminations. These errors produced an accumulation of material at the distal end of the core. There is also evidence for opposed and crossed removals. Adopting a core rejuvenation strategy, a plunging distal termination removed the accumulated material from the flaking surface of the core.

Modification

A separate report comments on the secondary modifications (cf. van Gijn and Sorensen 2013). The report deals with pressure friction at the distal end, although it does not appear to deal with modifications to the lateral left from proximal to medial, and lateral right at the proximal.

Discussion

Fabricators date from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. For example, there are numerous artefacts illustrated in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (<https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/q/fabricators/objectType/FABRICATOR>). These artefacts were used as either strike-a-lights, or for the processing of other materials such as leather and possibly stone (Edmonds 1995).

Hopman (2011), referencing Clarke (1970) and Cave-Brown (1992), refers to fabricators being skilfully worked artefacts, implying concept from core to tool. I would argue that this distinguishes those forms from the Forteviot strike-a-light. Firstly, the tool is not a fabricator. Secondly, there is no extensive modification in preparation. Thirdly, the initial concept was as a core rejuvenation strategy. After detachment from the core, an intensity in the relationship of blank with the

knapper determined its reconceptualization as a strike-a-light. This abstract understanding is from:

“It is things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression” (Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964], 4); and

“.... every thing, thinks and is a thought to the extent that, reduced to its intensive reasons, it expresses an Idea the actualisation of which it determines.” (Deleuze 2004 [1968], 316).

I would argue the later removal from the ventral surface did not occur during either deposition in the cist, or during the micro-excavation in the laboratory. As such, the removal occurred at some point in the curation of the artefact, after the marginal patination of the artefact, and before its placement in the cist. The fire making kit is analogous to the archery items associated with Bronze Age funerary practice. It marks, along with the other grave goods, the symbolic status bestowed upon the deceased by their community.

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References

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